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Symposium Wonders What's Happened to U.S. World Role

Will Tehran Seige In Time Prove to Be Blessing in Disguise?

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AUSTIN, Texas — The Russians are in Afghanistan, the Iranians are in our embassy, the dollar is in tatters, nearly all the world's exportable oil is in the Arabian peninsula and America is in decline.

"How the hell did we get here?" wondered Walter Cronkite, the CBS anchor man, who was on hand to give the keynote speech at a symposium called "The International Challenge of the '80s — Where Do We Go From Here?"

The symposium was sponsored by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and the University of Texas. While students joked feebly about registering next semester at "the other U.T.," the University of Toronto, the group of American opinion makers gathered here last week in an auditorium under the massive, marble library found America's place in the world no laughing matter.

Cronkite recalled some recent American history and observed, "After Vietnam we turned away from foreign aid, foreign issues and foreign challenges as much as we could, but the world today will not permit such withdrawal, as we so rudely have been reminded."

The notion that Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan are a warning to America became something of a theme for the symposium.

"Not only have they united us as nothing has done in 20 years, they have awakened us," Cronkite said. "If the mess in central Asia does not produce catastrophe, we may one day be able to say, with the people in those commercials, 'Thanks, we needed that.'"

There was disagreement on how the warning should be read and what America should do about it.

Norman Podhoretz, editor of the magazine *Commentary*, said he be-

lieved the Soviet Union would not have moved into Afghanistan unless it believed the balance of power with the United States had tipped in its favor.

Cronkite, said Podhoretz, "seemed to identify what we needed as a resurgence of the old emphasis on the North-South problem, the resurgence of American determination to do something about the international order, problems like poverty and famine and overpopulation and pollution."

The editor disagreed with that formulation, saying the struggle was not primarily between the have-nots of the southern hemisphere and haves of the northern, but was still between the old adversaries, East and West. "What we needed was a lesson in the consequences to us of the decline of American power and a rise in Soviet power," Podhoretz said, adding that Iran and Afghanistan supplied such a lesson.

The United States, he went on, must now "reassert the kind of leadership . . . against the threat of the new barbarism . . . which is Soviet totalitarianism and everything it represents."

McGeorge Bundy, former national security adviser to Presidents Johnson and John F. Kennedy and former head of the Ford Foundation, said there were more reasons for the U.S. predicament than the decline of U.S. power.

Bundy said the Third World could be expected to be more assertive of its own interests and that power was now more diffused around the world.

"We do not have, and never did have the kind of strength that would allow our conventional forces to surround the borders of the Soviet Union," said Bundy. "Afghanistan has never been within any American parameter."

For Bundy, the lesson of Afghanistan was that the Soviet Union has "a brutal contempt for world opinion and part of the current effort is to teach them that that kind of brutal contempt has a cost."

While Podhoretz saw the Soviet Union aiming directly at the oil supplies of the West with its moves in

Asia, Bundy saw greater dangers that the oil nations would themselves withhold oil from the West or even disintegrate as functioning nations.

Bundy cautioned against the notion that unleashing the CIA could make a dramatic difference in the circumstances.

"There have been very important changes," he said. "If the CIA were still at its best, it could not run the crowds in Tehran today as it did to some degree 25 years ago."

"The tides of sentiment have changed too much for that, and there is no way of creating a mystical secret capability by legislating it," Bundy said.

President Carter's handling of foreign affairs came in for no criticism in the house that his last Democratic predecessor built. There were some oblique references to the length of time it has taken him to learn his job, but beyond that he picked up some explicit support.

W. Averell Harriman, former governor of New York and a fixture in U.S. foreign policy for decades, tossed away his prepared speech, saying Carter's State of the Union address had made it obsolete. "I fully support the president's positions," said Harriman.

Harriman said he hopes that after this election year Carter and the Congress may return to the non-partisan approach to foreign policy that characterized Washington during World War II and the years that followed.

As a counterpoint to the serious and gloomy estimates that solemnly occupied most of the panelists, Barbara Jordan, a former congresswoman from Texas and now a professor here, offered her own prescription.

"The future is inevitable," she told the large crowd that by that time needed a laugh.

Beyond that, Jordan said that peace, too, is inevitable "if we get people of conscience and good will working together."